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Long Seeks to Prohibit U.S. Snooping Into Mail

By Paul A. Schuette
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Sen. Edward V. Long (D-Missouri) said yesterday he will sponsor legislation prohibiting Government agencies from snooping into first-class mail without a search warrant.

Long was less than satisfied after his Senate Judiciary subcommittee heard Post Office officials defend the legality, but not the practice, of seizures of first-class mail by the Internal Revenue Service.

"The further we get into this investigation," said Long, "the more I am impressed with the idea that the Post Office Department should deliver the mail and not pry into it. It is deplorable that two of our great departments would stoop so low as to snoop into first-class, sealed mail."

The subcommittee had a letter from Postmaster General John A. Gronouski saying that mail "levies" by the IRS were stopped last August by agreement with the Treasury Department.

The agreement would permit the agency to claim the

mail of a delinquent taxpayer if the IRS Commissioner personally approves use of the procedure.

Gronouski said in the letter that both he and Secretary of the Treasury Henry Fowler would support legislation exempting mail from property seizure by the IRS.

He also gave the subcommittee a list of 34 businesses and individuals whose mail had been delivered to the IRS in response to levies issued over the past three years.

The subcommittee, which earlier this year probed mail cover operations by the Post Office Department, reopened its investigation after disclosure of the IRS mail seizures by Representative Darnold C. Hall (R-Missouri).

Hall told the subcommittee yesterday that he has received "unevaluated" information that other agencies also are snooping into the mail. Postal officials deny this. Hall said he would check the reports before passing them along to the subcommittee.

Chief Postal Inspector Henry B. Montague was questioned by Long about his testimony last February in which he assured the subcommittee that "the seal on a first-class piece of mail is sacred."

Montague said he still stands by his assertion that first-class mail is secure against illegal search and seizure. IRS mail levies, he said, are not illegal.

Long suggested that Montague had misled the subcommittee. IRS officials will be called later to testify on the mail seizures, he said.